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Nintendo's Eiji Aonuma discusses the future of Zelda development

Features

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Нравится [Зарегистрируйтесь](#), чтобы посмотреть, что нравится друзьям.

He's the man who took over The Legend Of Zelda series from Ocarina Of Time onwards, and, by consequence, the custodian of one of the most cherished videogame franchises of all time. This month, Eiji Aonuma sits down for a rare chat with games™ about the difficulties of keeping such a series fresh and how it might evolve in the future

[Nintendo's Eiji Aonuma discusses the future of Zelda development](#)Your latest game, Spirit Tracks, is the first canonical Zelda title to involve Princess Zelda herself in the gameplay. Why did you decide to make Zelda playable this time and why has it taken so long?

First, about the reason why you are now going to be able to control Princess Zelda. Back in the days when we first released Phantom Hourglass, we had established the battle mode. And even though it was just a Wi-Fi mode with one-on-one gameplay, we had some solid response about the ability for the player to control the Phantom character by drawing the path he should follow. And we thought at that time that we would probably be able to take that and incorporate it into the main gameplay. In fact, that was actually one of the most important things that led us to the new project that eventually became Spirit Tracks. Of course, at that time, we had to discuss the story. Why would an archenemy like the Phantom become your ally, we asked ourselves? And during that discussion we came up with the idea that one way would be if a second character took control of that Phantom for you. But who? We thought Zelda might be an interesting and appropriate character. So that's how we decided upon the story where Zelda is going to have her body taken away by an enemy. One of the most important facets of the story would be for Link to regain her body, but at the same time her spirit form can take on the adventure together with Link.

An additional explanation actually has something to do with your second question. You may be thinking that we could have invented any character to take on the role of the Phantom spirit. So why Zelda? Well, here's another element. The main director of Spirit Tracks has had some great concern about the Zelda franchise, specifically the kind of person Zelda is as a character has never been clearly identified. And he insisted that we take this opportunity to clearly identify who she is. Personally, I also think that her entire appearance may also explain why we've never made use of her before. From the first game she wore a skirt and, from the developer's viewpoint, animating someone in a skirt is actually not so easy. That's why in The Wind Waker, Tetra (who was actually Princess Zelda) was not wearing a skirt. That's why she couldn't accompany Link in the past, but now that she's in spirit form, wearing a skirt is not such a big issue for the animators.

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Nintendo has been criticised in the past for characters like Zelda, Peach and Donkey Kong's Pauline. They're all damsels in distress rather than pro-active heroines. Are you hoping to change that perception?

Oh yes, I think so. In fact, sometimes in the past our staff members have done some research into how players think about our game characters. Many users have remarked that it's not interesting if the women were characterised as people who always need to be rescued by the men. Boys will always want to play the hero, who will always reach out a helping hand to the girl, of course. But this time around, by clearly depicting what kind of personality Princess Zelda has, I think it can deepen the game experience for the player. Come to think about it, the Sheik character in Ocarina Of Time... Although she didn't appear very often through the game, we found that many people appreciated that particular incarnation of Princess Zelda.



Spirit Tracks is now the third Zelda game to use the cel-shading technique. What is it you enjoy about working in that art style?

The first title for which we used cel-shading was The Wind Waker, but we have to admit that the technique was still in the experimental stage and our aim was to make the first Zelda with a new type of graphics. With Phantom Hourglass, we were thinking purely about how to make the first Zelda for DS platform. The limitation we faced was that, although there was an enormous amount of information to be displayed on-screen, those screens were actually very small in comparison to a home TV screen. For us to be able show a lot of information, we had to change the proportions of the characters in relation to their surroundings, and the only solution was to adopt a super-deformed style for the characters. And cel-shading was the most appropriate way to realise those manga-like proportions so that the animation would look right. And because we'd decided to adopt a touch operation for the gameplay, we needed a top down perspective, which worked very well with cel-shading.

You mentioned there that Wind Waker was an experiment. Majora's Mask fell into that category too, but most other Zeldas follow the template laid out by the original NES game or Ocarina Of Time. When you're creating a new Zelda game, how do you decide whether to be experimental or follow the classic style?

I should probably have not used the term 'experiment' when talking about the adaptation of cel-shading into Wind Waker. I used that term with the benefit of hindsight, but of course, when we were actually working on Wind Waker we were not thinking of it as an experiment at all. The cel-shading was a new opportunity for us to provide a very unique and unprecedented play experience. And, talking about uniqueness, I believe that Zelda is all about unique experiences. And how we create those experiences actually varies from game to game. With the leap from Phantom Hourglass to Spirit Tracks, even though we're trying to be unique, people may think that Spirit Tracks is not unique, because it is using the same engine and the same controls as before. So in order for us to uphold the uniqueness of the franchise, we had to think of other ideas outside the presentation and controls. That's why we introduced the train idea and the ability to control Princess Zelda.

Come to think about it, if a player feels that one of our games was experimental then it's probably because we weren't able to provide the customer with a stable feeling. So if people feel that Majora's Mask was an experimental game in the Zelda series then that's something that we have to assume was because we didn't give the impression of a stable and solid gameplay system.

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